

Army Had Dossiers on 18,000 Americans

By RICHARD HALLORAN
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WASHINGTON — The United States Army fed the names of about 18,000 American civilians into its computers, dossiers and files in a wide-ranging intelligence operation during the tumultuous days of civil disturbances from the summer of 1967 through the fall of 1969.

In the operation, which was ordered ended last year, 1,000 Army agents gathered personal and political information on obscure persons, as well as the prominent, on advocates of violent protest and participants in legitimate political activity. The emphasis was on radicals, black militants and dissenters against the war in Vietnam.

THE MILITARY intelligence operation picked up much of its information from police officials and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but supplemented that data and collected its own through agents posing as members of the groups under surveillance, as newsmen, or merely as interested bystanders.

The Army now authorizes only limited intelligence-gathering on incidents that might lead to a presidential call for federal troops. But attention was sharply focused last month on the Army operation when Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr.,

D-N.C., contended that prominent political figures in Illinois had been under military surveillance since 1968.

Ervin is skeptical of the Army's announcement about halting the spying and has scheduled hearings by the Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights of which he is chairman, to begin Feb. 23.

A study included the following:

—Directives from cabinet-level officials, authorizing intelligence-gathering to help the Army carry out its mission of quelling civil disorders, were imprecise. Army guidelines for subordinate commands were loosely drawn — like "a license to steal," one Pentagon source said.

—In a variation of an old Army game, each subordinate expanded on his instructions to please his superiors and to protect himself from charges that he had not done his job.

—Once started, the intelligence operations generated a demand for its product from the Justice Department, the F.B.I., police departments and other government agencies. A source close to the operation said, "we created addicts for this stuff all over the government."

—Some younger agents enjoyed playing James Bond. Largely college-educated and working away from Regular

Army discipline, these men found it more fun to spy on political agitators than to make the routine security checks that have long been a primary task of military intelligence.

—Some overzealous military and civilian officials saw in racial and political outbursts the spectre of Communist subversion and an attempt to overthrow the government.

—The network involved was but one part of a vast, interlocking intelligence exchange that Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and probably President Nixon, knew was in operation, although they may not

have been aware of all of its details.

—There was no conspiracy, as far as could be discerned, by the military to subvert political liberties. One critical former agent said that "these were not malevolent men." Rather, he said, they were well-intentioned men crying out what they considered to be legitimate orders from political authorities.